



**Office of the Attorney General
Paul G. Summers**

NEWS RELEASE

Office of the Attorney General at
P.O. Box 20207 Nashville, TN 37202-0207

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CONTACT:
Sharon Curtis-Flair
(615) 741-5860

**ATTORNEY GENERAL SUPPORTS NATIONAL FRAUD AGAINST SENIOR CITIZENS
AWARENESS WEEK CAMPAIGN**

Tennessee Attorney General Paul G. Summers today announced support for a nationwide effort to warn senior citizens, their families and their caregivers that older Americans are increasingly becoming the targets of con artists.

Attorney General Summers joined other attorneys general in supporting the Postal Inspection Service effort to raise public awareness and to prevent elder fraud and ensure the prosecution of crimes against seniors.

"It is imperative we reach out to our senior Tennesseans," Summers said. "Education is the key to keeping unscrupulous con artists from taking advantage of our senior citizens and we feel this national awareness campaign can bring the problem and resolution to the forefront."

Fraud complaints are on the rise, and more people age 60 and over are becoming victims, according to Lee Heath, Chief Postal Inspector, who joined Postmaster General John E. Potter, Federal Trade Commission Chairman Timothy J. Muris, and representatives of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Postal Inspection Service at a national news conference in Washington, D.C. today. Actress Betty White will participate in a satellite media tour from Los Angeles.

People 60 years old and older account for 26 percent of telemarketing fraud victims, according to the Alliance Against Fraud in Telemarketing and Electronic Commerce. Seniors also represented the largest numbers of participants in prizes and sweepstakes, where they account for 60 percent of the

victims. According to the National Consumers League, it is estimated that illegal telemarketing operations bilk U.S. citizens out of at least \$40 billion annually. A significant number of illegal contest and prize scams originate in Canada.

Mail fraud complaints are up 27%, according to the Postal Inspection Service. The agency responded to 66,000 mail fraud complaints in 2001 and 68,000 in 2002. "The Inspection Service has shut down 40 illegal telemarketing operations so far this year, a 43% increase over last year," said Chief Inspector Heath. "We have also stopped 80 deceptive mailing operations, up 40% from last year."

The campaign will warn senior consumers about fraud with awareness posters in over 38,000 post office lobbies, newspaper ads in selected metropolitan markets and Public Service Announcements (PSAs) featuring actress Betty White. The campaign will also mail awareness information to approximately three million households of seniors and their families.

Many seniors find it hard to tell the difference between legitimate telemarketing calls and telemarketing scams. It is important that seniors know that their good judgment is the last line of defense against the con artist. Summers and other officials are advising seniors to be skeptical of any offer that sounds "too good to be true," and offer these crime prevention tips:

*Take your time. If you are pressured to make a quick decision, surrender your credit card information, or mail a check, you should hang up. You're not being rude, you're being wise.

*Don't buy something merely because you'll get a "free gift."

*Get all information in writing before you agree to buy.

*Check out the caller's record with the Tennessee Division of Consumer Affairs and the Better Business Bureau.

*Don't give your credit card number or checking account number to anyone who calls on the phone or sends you a postcard before checking them out.

*Never send money in response to a foreign lottery ad or solicitation, especially if you are told you've won. They're illegal and, most of the time, they are frauds.